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ABSTRACT

The research data in this report were assembled as a basis for exploring the relationship between emotional distress or disturbance in both black and white adjudicated delinquents. The focus of inquiry was, for example, the relationship between emotional disturbance and being delinquent, the difference between black and white delinquents, and the relationship of emotional disturbance and socio-economic class. The subjects were court-adjudicated, residential delinquent males, age 16 to 18 years, who were consecutive admissions to state and private institutions. Of 470 subjects, 328 were black and 142 were white. A control sample of 367 non-delinquent black boys, matched with the delinquents for age, was recruited from the neighborhoods and schools from which the delinquents came. The data were assembled by means of a self-reporting test, called the Emotional Reaction Inventory, along with a broad spectrum battery of psychological tests. Some of the results include: (1) the association between living and growing up in a ghetto area and development of considerable emotional distress; (2) the tendency of lower-class Negro delinquent teenage boys to be more emotionally disturbed than their non-delinquent counterparts; and, (3) the fact that the white delinquents were found to be more emotionally disturbed than the black delinquents. (Author/JW)

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EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IN GHETTO DELINQUENTS[1]

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EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IN GHETTO DELINQUENTS

Samuel Granick

The relationship between emotional or personality disturbance and delinquency has received considerable attention from researchers over the years. Results vary between the extremes of virtually all delinquents being regarded as emotionally disturbed (Healy and Bronner, 1936), to relatively few delinquents, particularly when they are from the lower socio-economic levels, being reported as having "demonstrable emotional disturbance" (Kvaraceus and Miller, 1959). This reflects the main two contrasting approaches in the literature dealing with the attempts to delineate the etiology of delinquency, namely, the socio-cultural versus the intrapsychic orientation. The former relates delinquency to normative environmental pressures. Thus, being delinquent is viewed as a normal adaptation to the culture with which the individual is identified or within which he lives and functions. The intrapsychic hypothesis describes delinquency as primarily a consequence of inner personality conflicts and tensions which strain the self control system of the individual beyond his endurance to work out his psychological and personal needs within the framework of societal norms. Available studies fail to support either view fully. An impressive array of evidence, however, suggests the probability that for a major proportion of delinquents, their behavior is an outgrowth of disturbing social pressures such as poverty, provocation by authorities, community disorganization and frustration of economic and social aspirations, which are superimposed on a conflicted, anxious, often angry, emotionally disturbed personality with weak ego control. Particularly relevant in this regard is the report by Stott (1960) which showed a uniformly greater prevalence of emotional disturbance in delinquents over non-delinquents coming from similar environments. He also found that delinquents "are equally maladjusted in whatever locality or cultural grouping they live". Along related lines, Conger and Miller (1966) found that both their "lower class" and non-lower class" delinquents were significantly disturbed emotionally as compared to the non-delinquent controls. Of interest in this investigation also is the finding of a greater incidence of delinquency

in the sample of Denver, Colorado children among the Spanish-American as compared to the Negro group, relative to their representativeness in the population. This is attributed to the relatively greater stability and cohesiveness within the Negro community. These studies, along with the Hollingshead and Redlich (1958), and the Midtown Manhattan investigations (Srole, 1962), as well as the bulk of research reviewed by Pettigrew (1964), offer strong evidence for the deleterious effects of social and economic disadvantages on the personality makeup and functioning of people, regardless of their race, ethnic group and intellectual level. They support the idea of a three way relationship between social status, personality disturbance and delinquency. In this context the adverse social problems to which individuals are subjected are viewed as producing tendencies toward behavior or personality disorders, of which delinquency may be an important and frequent, but not a necessary consequence.

Problems

The research data reported herein were assembled as a basis for exploring the relationship between emotional distress or disturbance in both black and white adjudicated delinquents. We will focus, in this report, on the following questions: (a) Is there a relationship between emotional disturbance and being delinquent? (b) Are there any differences in degree and kinds of emotional disturbance between black and white delinquents? (c) What relationship do socio-economic level, education, intelligence and age have to the presence and degree of emotional disturbance? (d) What is the relationship between the presence or absence of a father or father surrogate in the home of delinquents during their developmental years to indications of emotional disturbance in these boys? (e) How are "self perception as a delinquent" and emotional disturbance related? (f) What relationship exists between emotional disturbance and the extent to which the delinquent reports various kinds of non-normative or delinquent behavior about himself?

Sample: Our sample of subjects was made up of court-adjudicated, residential delinquent males, age16 to 18 years, who were consecutive admissions to four state and one private institution. The total number of subjects was 470 of whom 328 were black and 142 were

white. A control sample of 367 non-delinquent black boys, matched with the delinquents for age was recruited from the neighborhoods and schools from which the delinquents came. Matching for educational achievement was not possible, because the court-adjudicated delinquent group included a substantial proportion of school drop-outs. This reflects a basic difference in social behavior between the two groups of boys. The differences, however, were of moderate proportions, with the black delinquents being about a year lower in education than the black controls. They were also lower to a statistically significant degree on a standardized reading and arithmetic test, as well as on the non-verbal intelligence test (SRA). Another important feature of the samples was that 57 percent of the black delinquents and 65 percent of the black control group, as well as 76 percent of the white delinquents had fathers living in their homes. Unfortunately, a white non-delinquent control sample has not as yet been recruited, so that our comparisons will be limited to black and white delinquents, and to black delinquents and non-delinquents.

We were also interested in matching the delinquent and non-delinquent black groups on socio-economic status since this often reported to be a factor in incidence of emotional disturbance and psychopathology. For this purpose we developed an SES formula based on the following self-report items: mother's education, father's education, sufficiency of family income, regularity of mother's working, regularity of father's working, number of utilities in the home, family ownership of automobile, number of rooms in the house, number of siblings sharing bedroom with the subject.

We found no significant difference between the two groups in our total SES formula. The adjudicated delinquent group reported themselves to be higher (at the .05 level of confidence) on three specific items: sufficiency of family income, regularity of mother's work outside the home, and ownership of automobiles. We did not ascribe too much significance to these specific differences since there was no difference on the more adequate SES formula measure, and since we considered that response set could have contributed to these differences. In any event, if we do accept these higher SES indications for

delinquents as meaningful, it should mitigate against our finding a positive relationship between psychopathology and delinquency.

Method

The data on emotional disturbance were assembled by means of a self reporting type test which we called the Emotional Reaction Inventory, administered as part of a broad spectrum battery of psychological tests. A total of 40 items was derived from a combination of sources, particularly the Mooney Problem Checklist, the Cornell Selection Index, and the Saslow Symptom Checklist. The S is directed to check the occurrence of these symptoms for each of two types of situations, i.e. following anger and following fear or anxiety arousal. The total score, therefore, is for 80 items, but sub-scores are also derived for combinations of items as follows: (a) Aggressive feelings, such as "feel like smashing someone"; (b) Aggression against oneself, such as "feel like killing myself"; (c) Projected aggression, such as "feel others are against me"; (d) Aggressive acting out, such as "do something to get me in trouble with the law"; (e) Serious psychopathology, such as "feel like something is wrong with my mind"; (f) Response set to anger, such as "yes" to the question about expressing anger directly; and (g) Response set to anxiety and fear, such as "yes" to the question about expressing these feelings to others. When all the items are combined, except for those relating to "serious psychopathology", the score is called "total neurotic and anxiety reactions".

The presentation of the E Reaction Inventory was carried out on a group basis. Each S had a booklet and checked off the items he regarded as appropriate to himself as they were presented on an audio tape. This made for uniformity of presentation of the items. Cooperation on the part of the Ss was quite good. Directions were followed willingly and without much difficulty. It often appeared that the Ss enjoyed the opportunity to report about themselves.

Results

(a) All the groups of Ss, the white and black delinquents, as well as the black control or community sample, checked a substantial number of items, reflecting the presence of

emotional distress, including items relating to "serious psychopathology". We, thus have a population sample generally which reports considerable emotional disturbance about itself. The delinquents, however, appear to be much more disturbed emotionally than the non-delinquents. The mean E Reaction score of the black and white delinquents combined is significantly higher than the score of the non-delinquent black group. In the comparison between the black delinquent and non-delinquent groups, the former is also significantly under more emotional distress on three out of the nine possible scores, namely, "aggressive feeling", "aggressive acting out", and "serious psychopathology".

(b) With respect to the question about the possible difference between the black and white delinquents on emotional distress, the data suggest that the white delinquents are more emotionally disturbed. The white delinquents appear relatively more aggressive in their reactions. They also report significantly more serious psychopathology about themselves.

(c) Socio-economic status was found in our data to be essentially unrelated to emotional distress, i.e., emotional problems appeared to be distributed about equally within the restricted range of the socio-economic level, (Class V and VI) of our study population. The range of SES levels was very narrow on all three of our samples; that is, these groups were quite homogeneous for low socio-economic status. We therefore want to be careful not to overgeneralize this finding of little or no relationship between psychopathology and socio-economic status in delinquents. It is conceivable that we would find more of a relationship between these factors if we studied a more heterogeneous group of delinquents which would reflect the total SES distribution in our society.

On the other hand there is a significant negative correlation between level of education of the Ss and the number of emotional difficulties they reported. The particularly significant correlations indicate that the lower the education of the S, the greater his tendency to be aggressive against himself, to act out and to exhibit serious psychopathological symptoms. Similarly, level of intelligence is found also to be negatively correlated to amount of emotional symptoms reported. Aggression against oneself, acting

out, and serious psychopathology are here also related inversely to measures of intellectual capability. With respect to age, too, emotional problems appear to have an inverse relationship, with "aggressive acting out" and "serious psychopathology" being most outstanding.

(d) On the matter of father or father surrogate absence in the home during the delinquent's developmental years, the data show a rather interesting and, perhaps, surprising pattern. Father being present correlates significantly with disturbed emotionality for seven out of the nine scores, the correlation for "serious psychopathology" being highest. When the groups are independently evaluated with respect to race, we find that the black delinquents have the significant E Reaction scores in relation to father presence. The correlations are highest in the areas of aggression and serious psychopathology. A "set to anxiety and fear" is reported for those whose father was absent. For the white delinquents, on the other hand, the E Reaction scores are, as a whole, not significantly correlated with either father presence or absence.

(e) Perception of oneself as a delinquent is clearly associated by both the black (seven of the nine scores significant) and the white (six of the nine scores significant) delinquents with emotional disturbance. The aggression and the serious psychopathology scores, once again, are outstanding.

(f) As might be expected from the above, the total score on the test in which the Ss reported delinquent acts about themselves is quite significantly correlated with emotional distress. For the white delinquents six out of the nine correlations are significant, and for the black delinquents, eight out of the nine correlations are significant. Particularly high correlations for both groups are found in relation to "aggressive feelings", and "aggressive acting out". As for the other areas, "serious psychopathology" is also high for both delinquent groups.

Summary of Findings

In pulling the various findings together, the following characteristics of our groups of Ss present themselves:

(1) Living and growing up in a ghetto area, such as is the case with the black Ss, both delinquent and non-delinquent, appears to be associated with developing a considerable amount of emotional distress as measured by the E Reaction Inventory.

(2) Lower class Negro delinquent teen-age boys tend to be more emotionally disturbed than their non-delinquent and less seriously delinquent counterparts. (We were not able to evaluate whether some of the reported emotional disturbance in our institutionalized delinquent sample was related to being away from familiar surroundings of home and neighborhood, separated from their families, and undergoing the stress of adjusting to institutional life.)

(3) The white delinquents are found to be more emotionally disturbed than the black delinquents. Particularly important seems to be the fact that the former report significantly more symptoms of serious psychopathology about themselves than the black delinquent Ss.

(4) Socio-economic level is relatively unrelated to degree of emotional distress in the Ss, within our restricted SES range.

(5) Education, intelligence level and age are each inversely related to extent of emotional symptoms in the study population. Thus, the lower the education, the intelligence, and the age, the greater the emotional disturbance reported by the Ss.

(6) Father or father surrogate presence in the home of the black delinquents during their developmental years is found to be associated with a significant degree of emotional distress, the area of "serious psychopathology" being most outstanding. For the white delinquents, on the other hand, presence of a father figure shows no relationship to the emotional disturbance scores.

(7) Self perception as a delinquent is clearly associated for both black and white delinquents with emotional disturbance.

(8) There is a strong positive relationship between emotional distress and the extent to which both groups of delinquents reported themselves as engaging in delinquent acts.

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